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COUNTY REPORTS BOTULISM CASE LINKED TO HOME PICKLED PRODUCT ***Cautions Against Preserving Food at Home Without Proper Safety Measures***

(Phoenix) -- The Maricopa County Environmental Services and Public Health Departments reported the first case of adult foodborne Botulism in the County in four years. They traced the source to a home pickled product and urge people to be cautious about pickling, canning or preserving food at home without following specific steps to avoid this rare but potentially life threatening foodborne disease.

“If you don’t know a lot about preserving food at home, or have questions about its safety, inquire about the proper way to process foods. If you are not sure, don’t do it,” said Dr. Jonathan Weisbuch, Director of the Department of Public Health. “Most Botulism outbreaks in this country are due to home-processed vegetables, fish, or meat products. The greatest hazard is that these products are improperly handled and are not cooked sufficiently to destroy C. botulinum spores. If you still want to prepare these foods at home, take precautionary measures to ensure your safety,” Weisbuch said.

The cause of concern in the bottling/canning, pickling or preservation of foods is an organism called Clostridium botulinum. This organism, a bacillus, when placed in a warm environment without oxygen or air, in a food jar left at room temperature, will grow and produce a toxin that causes the illness. The spoiled food will not taste or smell bad. The spores may be found in many foods, including vegetables, honey, pork, and in soil (dirt).

Illness symptoms usually start 12-72 hours after eating the toxin. Botulism symptoms include:

- nausea,
- vomiting,
- fatigue,
- dizziness,
- double vision,
- dryness of throat and mouth,
- lack of fever,
- constipation,
- paralysis of muscles,
- respiratory failure, and
- death

There is a treatment to stop the action of the toxin in the body. So the sooner a person seeks medical care the better. If you have any of these symptoms, call your physician and go to the nearest Emergency Room, because Botulism can kill.

Follow these steps to avoid Botulism:

1. Ensure your safety by contacting your local [agricultural extension service](#). They are the best source of information available to the public on home food preservation.
2. Not all old recipes are safe. Use only a recently published recipe.
3. Keep records of when you first prepared the food; date the bottle or can.
4. Use only commercially processed spices or ingredients. In this country, most of these products are safely treated to control the Botulinum spore.
5. Use wholesome food products. Some raw meats can be more contaminated than others. Pork or beef ears, feet, and other parts may be more contaminated than muscle meats during processing.
6. If you process food at home, you must heat it for a specific length of time under a specific number of pounds of pressure in a special canning pressure cooker. Consult a current canning manual, contact your agricultural extension service, visit one of the websites listed, or call the phone number listed below. Remember, if you are in doubt, do not process or pickle at home!
7. Use only new vinegar to maintain product acidity. Most newly opened retail bottles of vinegar have the acidity you need for your product. The organism does not grow and produce toxin when the food is very acid (4.5 pH or lower). Commercial vinegar is very acidic, less than 4.0 pH level at first; but as time goes by, and the bottle is opened, the acidity may be reduced.
8. Keep the prepared food product in your refrigerator. This organism's growth is controlled at temperatures below 50 degrees F. (Home refrigerators should be 45 degrees or lower.) Leave at room temperature only for limited amounts of time, to serve the food and no longer.
9. Throw away opened refrigerated foods after seven days. Even though the commercial canned products are safe to keep for more than 21 days, home-prepared foods may be more risky. Commercial products almost always have the right combination of ingredients to ensure a longer shelf life.

“Be aware that this microbe does not always make the food smell or taste bad,” said Carmen Amaya, Foodborne Illness Program Assistant Coordinator, Maricopa County Environmental Health Services Department. “It may look fine, but it can be dangerous,” Amaya said.

For more information about foodborne illness, go to www.foodsafety.gov or www.cdc.gov or call the CDC at 1-800-311-3435. For more information on canning, contact the University of Arizona at 623-546-1715 or the Maricopa Agricultural Center at 520-568-2273.